

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-11 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-05 SAM-01 ARA-06 /098 W

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R 281708Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5038

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

RUIJMEMBASSY DAKAR 3309

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USMISSION USUN NY

USCINCEUR

CINCUSNAVEUR

FOSIF ROTA

COMSIXTHFLT

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NOUAKCHOTT 0215

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR MOPS PDEV MR SS MO

SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: MAURITWLIAN DEVELOPMENTS

SUMMARY: RESIDENTS IN AND AROUND DAKHLA JE CONFRONTED WITH FOOD SHORTAGES WHILE MAURITANIAN LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS IN NEWLY-ACQUIRED TERRITORY REMAIN. FALL OF 'AIN BEN TILI IS NOT CONSIDERED SERIOUS, ALTHOUGH GIRM SECURITY SITUATION IN THIS REGION IS NOT GOOD. THERE HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN HEAVY USE OF MOROCCAN JETS IN VICINITY OF 'AIN BEN TILI. IN SPITE OF PROBLEMS, FOREIGN MINISTER MOUKNASS IS OPTIMISTIC AND UPBEAT. AT SAME TIME, HE HAS LASHED OUT AGAINST EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL OPPONENTS OF MAURITANIA'S SAHARAN POLICY. RUMORS OF POSSIBLE
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CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN SAHARA PERSIST. END SUMMARY.

1. SITUATION AT DAKHLA: WE HAVE HEARD FROM VARIETY OF SOURCES THAT MAURITANIAN TAKEOVER OF DAKHLA HAS ENCOUNTERED NUMBER OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS. LOCAL POPULATION WAS NOT INITIALLY AND APPARENTLY STILL IS NOT ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT PROSPECT OF MAURITANIAN CONTROL. SOON AFTER ARRIVAL OF MAURITANIAN FORCES, DAKHLA RAN SHORT OF FOOD, REQUIRING IMMEDIATE AIR SHIPMENT OF 100 GOATS FROM NOUADHIBOU. GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PAPER, CHAAB, REPORTED THAT SHIP TRANSPORTING LARGE AMOUNT OF RICE AND OTHER NECESSITIES LEFT NOUADHIBOU JANUARY 26 FOR DAKHLA. GIRM HAS DECIDED TO TAKE CHARGE OF ALL GOVERNMENT SERVICES IN DAKHLA. THUS, CHAAB COULD ANNOUNCE JANUARY 27 THAT HEALTH SERVICES, BANK BRANCH, AIR MAURITANIE OFFICE, SNIM (GIRM INDUSTRIAL HOLDING COMPANY) OFFICE, AND OTHER SERVICES HAD BEEN PUT IN PLACE. IN FACT, AIR MAURITANIE HAS INSTITUTED REGULAR SCHEDULE OF FLIGHTS TO DAKHLA AND AUSERT. AT SAME TIME, MOROCCANS HAVE INSISTED ON CONTROLLING DAKHLA AIRPORT ON GROUNDS THAT GIRM DOES NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT PERSONNEL TO DO JOB. MOROCCANS ARE ALSO REPORTED WORKING ALONGSIDE SPANIARDS AT DAKHLA PORT. CONTINUED MOROCCAN PRESENCE, PARTICULARLY AT AIRPORT, IS CAUSING UNHAPPINESS WITHIN GIRM. FOREIGN MINISTER MOUKNASS CALLED IN SPANISH CHARGE JANUARY 27 AND SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED THAT SPANISH PERSONNEL REMAIN AT AIRPORT SO THAT THERE WOULD BE NO FURTHER NEED FOR MOROCCANS.

2. FALL OF 'AIN BEN TILI: FROM STRATEGIC POINT OF VIEW, LOSS OF 'AIN BEN TILI IS NOT SERIOUS. IT HAS, HOWEVER, IMPORTANT ADVERSE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND BATTLE MAY HAVE COST CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF MAURITANIAN TROOPS. SPANISH CHARGE REPORTS THAT 140 MAURITANIAN SOLDIERS WERE KILLED AND 35 WOUNDED. (OUR MAURITANIAN SOURCES TELL US PRIVATELY, ALTHOUGH NOT VERY CONVINCINGLY, THAT ONLY TWO OR THREE MAURITANIANS WERE KILLED.) ACCORDING TO SPANIARD, THERE WERE 200 GIRM TROOPS AT 'AIN BEN TILI BEFORE START OF FINAL THREE-DAY BATTLE.

3. USE OF MOROCCAN JETS: DURING JANUARY 27 SESSION
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WITH SPANISH CHARGE IN RESPONSE TO REPEATED DIRECT QUESTION, MOUKNASS CONFIRMED ACCURACY OF OFFICIAL MOROCCAN ANNOUNCEMENT THAT F-5 HAD BEEN BROUGHT DOWN BY SAM MISSILE INSIDE MAURITANIA. MOUKNASS ADDED THAT HE BELIEVED SAM WAS OPERATED BY ALGERIANS. HE ALSO NOTED THAT WAVES OF MOROCCAN JETS, STARFIGHTERS BY HIS ACCOUNT, HAD POUNDED 'AIN BEN TILI, FOLLOWING ITS EVACUATION BY MAURITANIANS, AND POLISARIO/ALGERIAN CAMPS IN VICINITY. MOUKNASS CLAIMED AD-

VERSARY HAD TAKEN HEAVY LOSSES FROM AIR ATTACKS AND FORT AT 'AIN BEN TILI HAD BEEN VIRTUALLY REDUCED TO RUBBLE. COMMENT: WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER MOROCCO HAS ANY STAR-FIGHTERS IN ITS INVENTORY. BUT WE DOUBT THAT MOUKNASS KNOWS DIFFERENCE BETWEEN F-5 AND STARFIGHTER. NEVERTHELESS, THRUST OF HIS COMMENTS IS SIGNIFICANT, I.E. MOROCCAN JET WAS SHOT DOWN AND NUMEROUS MOROCCAN JETS HAVE ATTACKED POLISARIO FORCES IN 'AIN BEN TILI REGION. END COMMENT.

4. TREND OF WAR IN MAURITANIAN SECTOR: AT END OF LAST WEEK, MAURITANIAN MILITARY OFFICERS WERE DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT SITUATION IN AREA AROUND 'AIN BEN TILI AND BIR MOGHREIN. LIKEWISE, FRENCH MILITARY ATTACHE EXPRESSED PESSIMISM OVER ABILITY OF GIRM TO HOLD POLISARIO AT BAY IN THIS AREA. FRENCH MECHANIC, WHO RETURNED LATE LAST WEEK FROM BORDER AREA, REPORTED THAT VEHICLE FLEET OF SECURITY FORCES WILL COME TO GRINDING HALT IF CURRENT PRACTICES CONTINUE. NO PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE IS BEING DONE. AS SOON AS A VEHICLE BREAKS DOWN IT IS PUSHED OFF TO SIDE OF ROAD AND ANOTHER IS SOUGHT. INJURED MILITARY PERSONNEL ARE STILL ARRIVING AT NOUAKCHOTT HOSPITAL WITH REGULARITY, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO ACCURATE STATISTICS OR EVEN EDUCATED GUESSES ON TOTAL NUMBER OF CASUALTIES. CONTINUING SPORADIC ARRIVAL AT NOUAKCHOTT AIRPORT OF MOROCCAN C-130S WITH MILITARY SUPPLIES ALSO SUGGESTS THAT GIRM HAS SHORTAGES OF MATERIEL. FINALLY, AIR MAURITANIE PILOTS ARE NOW REFUSING TO FLY TO BIR MOGHREIN. DESPITE CONCERN EVIDENCED BY PROFESSIONAL MILITARY, FOREIGN MINISTER MOUKNASS WAS OPTIMISTIC AND UPBEAT ABOUT SAHARA SITUATION DURING HIS SESSION WITH SPANISH CHARGE. HE POINTED OUT THAT ALL POPULATION CENTERS IN MAURITANIA PORTION OF SAHARA ARE NOW IN HANDS OF GIRM. (MOROCCANS, HOWEVER, REPORTEDLY ASSISTED

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MAURITANIANS IN RECENT CAPTURE OF AUSERT.) CHAAB REPORTED THAT MAURITANIAN MINISTER OF DEFENSE VISITED AUSERT ON JANUARY 26. MOUKNASS DESCRIBED LOSS OF 'AIN

NOTE BY OC/T: (#)AS RECEIVED.

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SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-05 SAM-01 ARA-06 EA-07 /105 W

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INFO AMYMBASSY ALGIERS 350

AMEMBASSY BAMWKO

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

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USCINCEUR

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NOUAKCHOTT 0215

BEN TILI AS TEMPORARY SETBACK AND ASSERTED THAT BIR MOGHREIN WILL NOT FALL. IN SHARP CONTRAST, MOUKNASS SUBORDINATE, DIRECTOR POLITICAL DIVISION MFA, MANIFESTED DEEP PESSIMISM OVER SAHARA ENTANGLEMENT.

5. FOREIGN MINISTER CRITICIZES OPPONENTS OF SAHARAN POLICY: FOLLOWING HIS RETURN FROM AFRICAN LIBERATION COMMITTEE (ALC) MEETING IN LOURENCE MARQUES, MOUKNASS LASHED OUT AT INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL OPPONENTS OF MAURITANIAN POLICY IN SAHARA. HE DESCRIBED ALL FOREIGN INTERVENTION AS INTERFERENCE IN MAURITANIAN INTERNAL AFFAIRS. HE ADDED THAT "CERTAIN COUNTRIES", IN ORDER TO SERVE THEIR OWN INTERESTS ARE DOING THEIR BEST TO
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MANIPULATE "CERTAIN ELEMENTS" OPPOSED TO REUNIFICATION OF MAURITANIA. HE NOTED THAT ALC MAJORITY ADOPTED RESOLUTION IN LOURENCO MARQUES ASKING NEXT OAU COUNCIL OF MINISTERS TO RECOGNIZE THIS "SUBVERSIVE MOVEMENT", I.E., POLISARIO. HE SAID "SUBVERSIVE MOVEMENT" IS COM-

POSED OF TWO KINDS OF INDIVIDUALS: (A) YOUNG PEOPLE FROM THE SAHARA WHO ARE ENGAGED IN A HOPELESS ADVENTURE AND (B) PROFESSIONAL AGITATORS, SOME OF WHOM WILL RETURN TO THE FOLD AND OTHERS WHO "WILL FIND NO REFUGE IN OUR COUNTRY IN VIEW OF THEIR DISHONESTY". MOUKNASS CONCLUDED THAT MAURITANIA WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT ALL AUTHENTIC LIBERATION MOVEMENTS AND TO GIVE THEM ALL NECESSARY ASSISTANCE. AT SAME TIME, IT WILL OPPOSE ANY MOVEMENT WHOSE GOALS ARE NOT CLEAR AND WHICH IS IN OPPOSITION TO LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENTS.

6. PROPAGANDA WAR UNDERWAY: JANUARY 28 CHAAB RAN FRONT-PAGE DENIAL OF FOREIGN NEWS BROADCAST WHICH ALLEGED THERE HAVE BEEN RIOTS IN NOUAKCHOTT. CHAAB QUOTED JANUARY 26 RADIO BROADCASTS FROM "BROTHER COUNTRY"- WHICH ALLEGED THAT RIOTS TOOK PLACE IN NOUAKCHOTT PROTESTING PRESENCE IN MAURITANIA OF MOROCCAN TROOPS. ARTICLE ADDED THAT RADIO BROADCAST CLAIMED POLICE BROKE UP DEMONSTRATION WITH ARMS, WOUNDING DOZENS OF PERSONS. CHAAB EMPHASIZED THAT RADIO REPORT WAS COMPLETE FABRICATION. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH EMBASSY IS AWARE SOME MAURITANIAN UNHAPPINESS EXISTS OVER SMALL MOROCCAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN MAURITANIA, WE DO NOT KNOW OF ANY RECENT DEMONSTRATION IN NOUAKCHOTT OR ANYWHERE ELSE IN COUNTRY OPPOSING MOROCCAN PRESENCE. NOUAKCHOTT REMAINS CALM, ALTHOUGH UNDER HEAVIER THAN USUAL SECURITY WRAP. RADIO BROADCAST MENTIONED BY CHAAB FROM "BROTHER COUNTRY" IS ALMOST CERTAINLY REFERENCE TO ALGERIA. SO FAR, HOWEVER, GIRM HAS NOT PUBLICLY CRITICIZED ALGERIA BY NAME. END COMMENT.

7. RUMORS OF CUBAN INVOLVEMENT: SPANISH CHARGE RELATED FOLLOWING COMMENTS TO EMBOFF CONCERNING RUMORS OF CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN SPANISH SAHARA. SPANISH TEAM OF JOURNALISTS ARRIVED IN MAURITANIA WEEK AND HALF AGO, HAVING JUST COME FROM ANGOLA. TEAM TOLD SPANISH CHARGE THAT WHILE IT WAS IN ANGOLA, IT WAS INFORMED THAT CUBANS CONFIDENTIAL

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"PLANNED" TO BECOME INVOLVED IN SAHARAN CONFLICT ON SIDE OF POLISARIO. COMMENT: ORIGINAL SOURCE OF THIS REPORT WAS NOT CITED NOR WAS THERE ANY INDICATION OF TYPE OF INVOLVEMENT PLANNED, E.G. TRAINING OF POLISARIO IN ALGERIA OR ACTUAL FIGHTING IN SAHARA. ADDITIONALLY, NO MAURITANIAN OFFICIAL HAS EXPLICITLY TOLD US THAT CUBANS, SOVIETS OR NORTH VIETNAMESE ARE INVOLVED IN COMBAT INSIDE SAHARA, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER POSSIBILITY OF INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE CONFLICT. END COMMENT. HANDYSIDE

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